Housing and Social Theory: Testing the Fordist Models
or
Social Theory and AfFORDable Housing

Alastair Greig

Urban Research Program
Working Paper No.45
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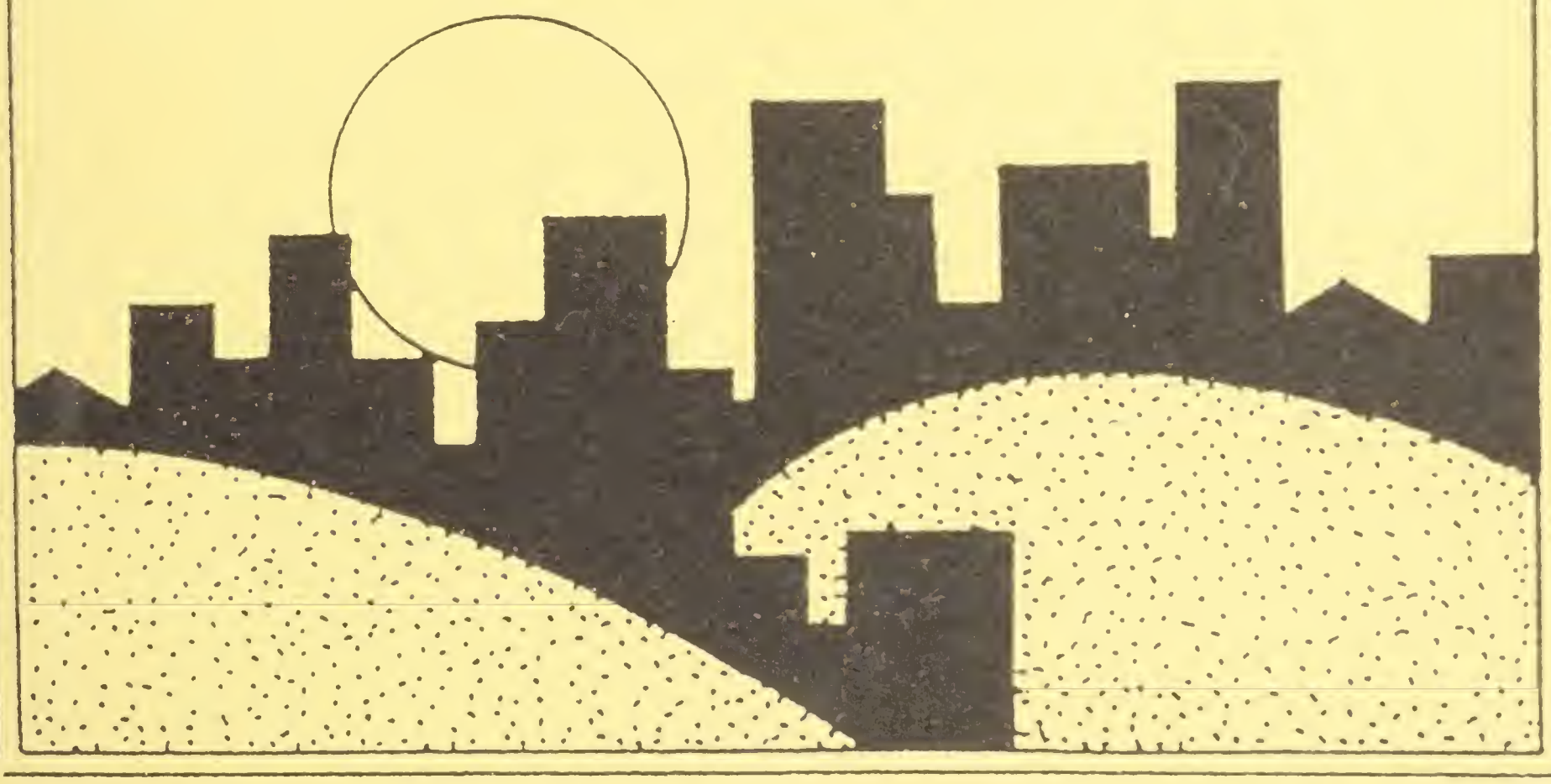

URBAN RESEARCH PROGRAM
RESEARCH SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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ABSTRACT

Although the concept of Fordism has been used to help explain a wide range of phenomena in Australian post-war political economy, there have been few attempts to assess its utility within the field of housing provision. This paper is a preliminanry attempt to 'test' the Fordist model.

It distinguishes between two uses of the concept: a narrow 'productivist' approach which focuses on the 'backwardness' of the housing industry, and a broader 'societal' approach which focuses on the interrelationship between dominant production techniques, patterns of mass consumption, and urban form.

The first section examines the narrow use of Fordism and argues that it has only limited practical and analytic value for explaining developments within the Australian housing industry. However, the second section of the paper suggests that the broader use of the concept—derived from the regulation school of political economy—is useful for explaining the coincidence between suburbanisation, mass consumption and mass production during the golden era of Fordism after the Second World War.

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas on the production, design, function and consumption of housing have always been closely related to prevailing views of wider processes of social transformation. An example of this relationship between ideas on housing and social change is the Housing Industry Association's *Our Homes Towards 2000* (HIA 1990). This booklet describes the home of tomorrow—one 'vastly different to the home our parents lived in'. By the year 2000, the needs of 'new and different' buyers will have led to the application of new micro-electronic and information technologies in the home. The new home will not only be a place of rest, but also a centre of leisure and entertainment. Other consumer activities such as shopping will be conducted from the home through electronic ordering. Smaller homes will be more multi-functional with rooms capable of adaptation for a range of activities. Flexible interior walls will replace permanent walls so homes will be instantly transformed from leisure centres to offices or workplaces with the flick of a control panel. Never again will citizens have to leave the confines of their home to fulfil simple routine tasks.

It is not difficult to uncover the influence of a variety of futurologists behind this vision of tomorrow's home. It is derived from predictions relating to the social consequences of Daniel Bell's 'post-industrial society' (1973), Toffler's 'electronic cottage' (1970) and McLuhan's 'global village' (1966). It can also be viewed as a reflection of that phase of 'time-space compression' which Harvey (1989) associates with the 'condition of post-modernity'.

This relationship between ideas on housing production and consumption and prevailing ideas on social change has remained consistent throughout this century. Periodically, a radical overhaul of housing form and

housebuilding techniques is called for in order to satisfy the new needs generated by the process of 'modernisation'.

THE CONCEPT OF FORDISM

This paper explores the uses and possible abuses of two concepts—Fordism and post-Fordism—which have emerged in the burgeoning literature surrounding industrial restructuring and tests their validity within the field of housing studies. It examines the relevance of Fordism as an analytical tool for assessing various aspects of Australian housing provision. In addition, the paper focuses on the period from 1945 to 1960. This era corresponds with the first half of the long post-war boom, or the 'golden age of Fordism' (Lipietz 1987, 36-9).

The discussion begins with an analysis of the concept of Fordism on the 'productive' level, through examining changing techniques and social relations of production within the housebuilding industry during the early post-war years. Fordism in this 'restricted' sense describes a particular techno-organisational system or technique of production at the level of the individual enterprise, or within an industrial sector. It is on this level of analysis that most Australian debates on Fordism and post-Fordism have revolved (Mathews 1989; 1992; Badham & Mathews 1989; Gahan 1992; Greig 1992; Bramble 1990).

However, the concept of Fordism also has a broader meaning, as a unified set of production, consumption and institutional practices. Fordism on this 'societal' level is often associated with the 'regulation school' of political economists, such as Aglietta (1979), Boyer (1988; 1990), Lipietz (1985; 1987; 1992) and Jessop (1990). Although the term 'Fordism' originated within a specific sector of production as a form of labour organisation tied to a technical innovation, it has become—as Lipietz (1987, 93; 1992, ch. 1) notes—'a social technology' which forms the basis of a specific developmental model based upon the coincidence of mass production, mass consumption and a variety of regulatory institutions guaranteeing minimum wage levels, a welfare state and Keynesian economic policies. In this broader sense, Fordism can be seen as a dominant techno-organisational paradigm, despite the existence of key non-Fordist sectors of production. David Harvey (1989, 135) makes essentially the same point, arguing that post-war Fordism was more than a system of mass production—it was 'a total way of life'. From these perspectives, Fordism

is principally a method of analysis for exploring how capitalism has been able to achieve relatively lengthy periods of social stability, despite certain tendencies which would appear to engender structural crises.

The second part of this paper argues that Fordism on this broader level provides a useful analytical framework for explaining the role which housing performed in post-war Australian capitalist development (Boyer 1990).

THE FORDIST MODEL MARK 1

This section explores the intellectual, social and economic context within which Fordist ideas for housebuilding developed. It then examines the fate of a variety of post-war Australian programs and visions central to industrialised, modernised—or Fordist—house production.

The recognition for a need to reconcile changing social relationships with housing production reached its height in the works of the early modernists. One of the transformations predicted and sought by the Bauhaus movement in the 1920s was the lifting of construction into the 'modern age'. The optimism of the Bauhaus rested on the belief that housebuilding inevitably would follow the forces of technical progress charted by 'more advanced' industries. Walter Gropius (n.d., 39) expressed this sentiment in *The New Architecture*:

> *And just as fabricated materials have been evolved which are superior to natural ones in accuracy and uniformity, so modern practice in house construction is increasingly approximating to the successive stages of a manufacturing process. We are approaching a state of technical proficiency when it will become possible to rationalise buildings and mass produce them in factories by resolving their structure into a number of component parts.*

Modernist ideas took on a new urgency in capitalist countries after World War II, as governments, manufacturers and consumers searched for means to overcome the pent-up demand for housing (Harvey 1989, 68). However, the housebuilding industry was still seen as an industrial anomaly. According to *Fortune* (1948) magazine, it remained 'the industry capitalism forgot' and the 'one great sector of modern society that has remained largely unaffected by the industrial revolution'. Despite this, a

general optimism prevailed, based on the inevitability of housebuilding following other industrial sectors into the age of mass production, standardisation and rationalisation—or Fordism.

Just as 1990s post-industrial predictions correspond with visions of flexible post-Fordist production, post-war modernism forecast the coming of Fordist mass-production in housebuilding.

These sentiments affected early post-war Australia as much as any other capitalist nation. The post-war housing shortage heightened the search for economies of scale and elevated the status of a design and construction philosophy which demanded that 'form follow function'. According to the Commonwealth Housing Commission's 1944 Report: 'In our opinion the stage is set for a radical change which might be described as similar to that which took place in the English textile industry at the time of the Industrial revolution' (CHC 1944, 77).

The Commonwealth Housing Commission had been asked to report on Australia's post-war housing requirements. Estimating that the nation faced a severe shortage of some 300,000 houses, it called for annual completion targets of 80,000 dwellings during the first decade after the war. The state would contribute half of the nation's new housing through Housing Commission contracts (CHC 1944, 11).

These ambitious targets demanded fundamental changes to the residential construction industry. The Report expected relatively less labour to surpass pre-war record annual completion rates as well as improving housing quality. The Government aimed to reach these targets through improving productivity and efficiency within the sector. The state, which would become the largest client of the industry, was now in a position to encourage and sponsor this industrial revolution through asserting its influence on firms tendering for Government contracts. On the basis of the Report, the post-war Federal Labour Government committed itself to an unprecedented level of intervention in housing provision. The modernisation of the housebuilding industry was therefore a matter of great importance to the post-war state. One senior Government official expressed the state's mission as taking 'housing from the horse and buggy era into the machine age' (quoted in Howard 1987, 80).

Immediately after the war the structure of the private sector retained most of its pre-war characteristics and remained the domain of the traditional small operator. The yawning gap between reality and the Government's vision was starkly illustrated by one State Housing Commissioner: 'To see three or four men assemble on a suburban block to erect a house is to step from the age of Henry Ford to that of erecting a medieval cathedral' (Alex Ramsey, quoted in Stretton 1978).

Government policy *did* contribute to the beginnings of new organisational phenomena after the war. One clear exception to the traditional pattern of small firm size was the company A.V. Jennings. Formed in Melbourne during the Depression, Jennings had grown by 1950 to become the largest employer of building labour in Australia. During the 1930s, the company had pioneered innovative estate building for the lower middle income market. Despite its pre-war success, the company's metamorphosis into a housebuilding giant began with its close relationship with the Victorian Housing Commission after the war. By 1950, Jennings was distinguished from the norm by its size and its geographic scope among other features (Garden 1992). However, Jennings was one of the few exceptions to the rule. Its relationship with State Governments was so lucrative that the company wound down its private housing contracts and it was only during 1954 that it even began considering moving back to private estate development (Garden 1992).

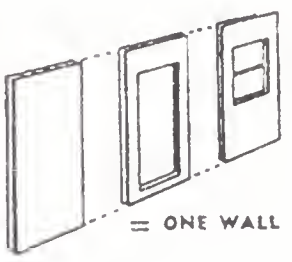
One of the principal obstacles which blocked the Government's industrialised vision was the acute shortages of labour and building materials. For instance, one significant feature which affected the structure of the industry during the post-war period was the growth of owner-builders. Labour and material scarcity stimulated the growth of owner-building after the war. During the 1950s approximately one-third of houses constructed in Australia were owner-built (Holland 1988; Yearbook of the Commonwealth Government 1957). These heroic suburban pioneers often built their house while living in a temporary structure on site or in a hastily erected garage. A number of owner-builders were also innovative in organisational terms. Collective self-help groups emerged in an effort to decrease construction time, reduce costs and to benefit from members' labour and diverse range of skills. Despite its innovative nature, this phenomenon appeared antithetical to industrialisation. On the other hand—partly as a consequence of this owner-builder phenomenon—a variety of

firms emerged specialising in 'partial erection', 'ready cut' homes and pre-cast houses (see Figure 1).

Build your own home

with MONOCRETE

AT LOWER COST!
Monocrete is a pre-cast building unit, complete in itself — no extra support, no additional wall lining is necessary.
And a Monocrete unit is only 4" thick! This means one additional square of inside area in every ten, compared to a brick house of the same outside dimensions — and at 10% less cost.



MORE EASILY!
Skilled tradesmen's labour is reduced to a minimum. You can lay your own foundations (just the piers is enough), put in the floors, and pitch the roof yourself. The laborious, time-consuming burden of erecting the walls is lifted from your shoulders — we erect the Monocrete units ourselves.
And Monocrete's Building Advisory Service is available to help you at every stage of the job.

FASTER!
Monocrete construction is speedy. Actual wall erection takes only three to four days. Modern steel window and door frames are ready-cast in the units. You simply glaze the windows and hang the doors.
Monocrete units are made to such precise dimensions that it is even possible to pre-cut the roof before the walls are actually in place.

WITH THESE ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGES

- Monocrete homes are accepted by all Building Finance Organisations.
- Concrete Industries also manufacture Monier Bricks, Monier Tiles, "Hollowbeam" flooring and many other concrete building materials, making it possible for you to obtain almost all your building materials from the one source.
- Monocrete units are precast to precise specifications. You can be sure of uniformity of materials on the job.

FREE!
Write or telephone for a free copy of our simply-written leaflet — "Building with Monocrete" — for full details of construction, or inspect our demonstration area at Villawood.

★ Illustrated is Monocrete's Standard two - bedroom design. Complete plans and specifications are available at a small charge.

MONOCRETE PTY. LTD., Monier Square, VILLAWOOD, N.S.W. Phone UB1351-5
A Division of Concrete Industries (Aust.) Limited

Figure 1 Advertisement for Monocrete, 1952
(Australian House and Garden, October)

Another consequence of this blossoming in owner-building was the blurring of distinctions between production and consumption. This filtered into the popular press. Magazines such as *Australian House and Garden*, and *Australian Home Beautiful* as well as daily newspapers reflected and influenced the trend and provided valuable practical assistance to owner builders. Other magazines only tangentially related to housing, such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* and *Cavalcade,* regularly featured simple, easy-to-erect, home plans for the uninitiated.

The housing crisis also had a direct effect upon housebuilding production relations. Before the war many small housebuilders retained the services of tradespeople as direct employees. The immediate post-war period marked an important step along the subcontracting path. According to Freeland (1972, 265):

> *With so much work to do and high wages being offered on all sides, employed tradesmen were assured of a fat living for a minimum return of quality and quantity. Individual or small groups of tradesmen took to subcontracting for the work of their trade. They worked quickly but not cheaply. With their own time being money they did the work quickly and roughly. Working seven days a week they made three or four times their award trade wage.*

A similar shift also occurred in the US, where, according to Schlesinger and Erlich (1986, 158), the 'insatiable demand for housing prompted hired hands to strike out on their own and become independent subcontractors'.

There were 'push' and 'pull' factors involved in this process of labour restructuring. While some commentators such as Freeland (1972) have emphasised 'pull' factors (workers' decision to take advantage of higher wages and self-employment) there is also evidence that private firms—as well as some Housing Commissions—preferred this form of contract. A.V. Jennings were involved in a number of disputes with the B.W.I.U. during the late-1940s and early-1950s in Tasmania and Canberra over the firm's use of subcontracted labour on Housing Commission projects (Garden 1992, 73, 102; see also evidence from Mr V. Helby of the NSW Housing Commission before the Burns Commission, 1981, 56).

Once the building activity of State Governments, owner builders and large builders are combined, the residual housebuilding activity remains significant. By the mid-1950s state housing accounted for around 20 per cent of all commencements and this level gradually declined throughout the next three decades. The few large firms which did exist in the early post-war era were attracted by government housing contracts and found this sphere of activity secure and profitable enough to suspend large-scale private building. Governments were content to farm out contracts to large firms in the expectation that the economies of scale which large firms operated under would encourage more efficient 'Fordist' practices of standardisation and prefabrication. However, although the government's intentions were clear, most large firms were more interested in the advantages of security of contract and were either unwilling or unable to explore new techniques and methods of production.

If the few existing large firms operated mainly within the state sphere, and owner builders never accounted for more than half of all private starts during the 1950s, then who produced the remainder of the nation's housing? There is controversy over the nature of this residual. Some have argued that during this period the small speculative builder flourished (Hutton 1970, 87; Freeland 1972; Paris 1987, 84). On the other hand, others claim that speculative housebuilding by small firms declined during the period of austerity and shortages (Pickett 1993, 81). Unfortunately there is rarely evidence to back up these claims apart from anecdotes.

This confusion over the changing structure of the industry during the late-1940s and 1950s relates to the fact that the combination of scarcity and growing state involvement led to a range of hybrid organisations which defied previous—and subsequent—categorisation. Large private firms were attracted to state contracts due to their volume and their relative security; owner builders suddenly became principal contractors—hiring builders and tradesfolk as needed and as building supplies became available; and speculative building in such a secure market was almost a contradiction in terms. However, these hybrids were unstable phenomena, dependent on the state of the building materials market, labour market forces and the level of state commitment to housing provision, among other factors.

On the whole, the government's vision of transforming the structure of the industry and encouraging large volume producers was less successful than

originally anticipated. Due to a complex array of circumstances, the industry remained in a state of flux throughout the 1950s, failing to move confidently onwards towards the Fordist future. This, it needs to be stressed, by no means implies that no significant changes occurred throughout the decade. It only implies that the notion that 'more advanced' Fordist industries would show the 'less developed' housebuilding industry the image of its own future, proved to be based on shaky underlying assumptions of the dynamics of technological and organisational change.

A similar fate befell the reformers' attempts to modernise the housebuilding industry through the promotion of innovation and technological change. Throughout the industrialised world, the vision of adequate and afFORDable housing rested on a belief in prefabrication, factory production, standardisation, rationalisation and other hallmarks of Fordism.

Scarcity was a double-edged sword which both promoted innovation, yet at the same time inhibited economies of scale. An advertisement which appeared in the *Australian Womens' Weekly* during the war for Masonite illustrates the intensity and severity of wartime and post-war scarcity (see Figure 2). At this stage of the conflict (1942) the dimensions of the post-war housing shortage were unknown. However, it conveys the coming intensity of the post-war housing crisis. Reading this advertisement one could be forgiven for assuming that the returning soldier was consumed by the desire to build a new dwelling! The advertisement states that 'the modern fighting man' could easily become 'obsessed' with Masonite. After the war, the desire for any building material became insatiable, and, in many cases, frustration lingered for years. (see Figure 3). Many commentators have pointed to the relationship between the shortages of materials and the plethora of innovations which flooded the market during this period (Walsh 1972, 63-6; Freeland 1972, 280; Marsden 1986, 99). Anything that could be pulled from the ground and reshaped was experimented with. One commentator could not understand why the nation continued to import white asbestos and why the industry 'appears curiously averse to the use of blue asbestos, of which we are just beginning to work enormous deposits in north-west Australia' (AIPS 1947).

However, much innovation during the period was merely ersatz, making it far less significant than the modernists would have liked. Ersatz innovation

Figure 2 Advertisement for Masonite , 1942
(Australian Women's Weekly, March)

Figure 3 Advertisement for Masonite, 1946
(Australian Women's Weekly, April)

by its very nature strives after the past. Prefabricated steel roofs were designed to look like tile roofs and the concrete tiles were regarded as the poor relation of the more popular terracotta roof. As Freeland (1992, 266) observed: 'The new products were not, in the main, aimed at finding really new materials but rather satisfactory substitutes for old ones which were in scarce supply' (see also Walsh 1972, ch. 8).

Innovative *products* were only part of the process of modernisation urged and fostered by post-war housing reformers and modernists. Of greater, yet related, significance was the search for innovative *processes* of production. For example, the late-1940s were the heyday of experimentation with prefabrication. War-time factories were refitted for this purpose and every conceivable scheme was assessed. By 1947, the NSW Housing Commission had examined over 200 designs and erected 25 different test houses (AIPS 1947, 26; see also Walsh 1972, 64). In Victoria, the state-sponsored Beaufort house, in particular, generated considerable excitement among industrialisers as well as the the general public. A variety of private firms loudly advertised their collaboration in the project (see Figures 4 & 5). However, most of these schemes proved more expensive than 'orthodox' dwellings. Between 1950 and 1953 another option was tried. Almost 20,000 prefabricated houses were imported from Europe (ANZ Bank 1954). The construction giant Lend Lease owed its modest origins to this scheme, as a joint venture between two Dutch companies erecting 200 Scandinavian prefabricated houses for the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority (Murphy 1984, 2-3). Both the British construction firm George Wimpey and the German firm Wender and Duerholt entered the Australian market through such construction contracts in 1951 (George Wimpey & Co. 1965, 1; Marsden 1986, 110-2). All contracts stipulated that the firms recruit their tradesfolk from overseas.

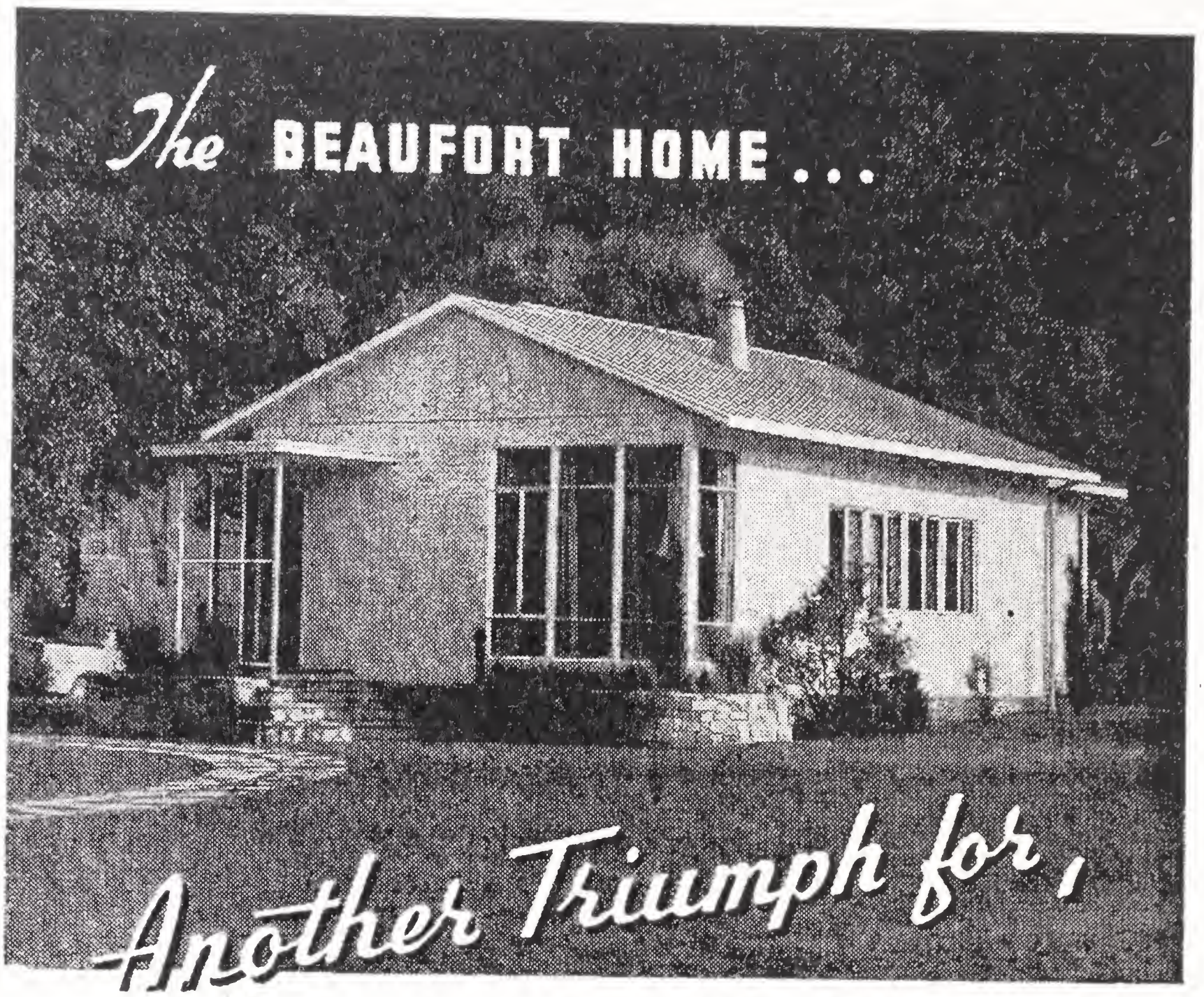
However, despite the excitement it generated, prefabrication failed to live up to the expectations of modernists, industrialists and the Commonwealth Housing Commission. The verdicts of a range of commentators will be examined below as a conclusion to this section as well as a verdict on the use of Fordism as a method of predicting technological change.

There are a number of factors which explain why modernisation excited reformists within the housebuilding industry during the period

immediately after the Second World War. There was a pressing need to solve the housing shortage and the capacity and willingness of the private sector was under a cloud (see Barnett, Burt & Heath 1944, 38). The fresh forces of modernism combined with social-democracy appeared as a potent force with transformative and progressive potential. The organisational role of the state and technological advances during the war further encouraged the belief that the housebuilding industry was ready for its technological 'take-off' (Bunning 1945, 40-1). A religious fervour was attached to the prophesy that a Henry Ford—clad in fibro—would return to lift the industry into the twentieth century.

However, the modernisation project—the belief that houses could roll off factory lines like Henry Ford's Model-T's—trundled along a sticky runway. The industry was hampered by severe shortages of labour and building materials. Although this encouraged innovation, the 'new' was usually considered inferior to conventional materials, processes and practices. However, the 'age of austerity' immediately after the war demonstrates the importance of scarcity in the drive for innovative solutions to housebuilding. While many innovations failed to make a significant impact upon the market at the time—or were simply viewed as substitutes—others were gradually refined over the next two decades and became more competitive relative to traditional products and processes (Walsh 1972). The state also succeeded in encouraging the growth of a few large firms through its role as the industry's largest client. However, these economies of scale failed to induce large firms to experiment seriously with prefabrication. By the mid-1950s as government housing contracts levelled off, then tapered off, these firms found their feet on the terrain of the private housing market or in commercial construction. Some, such as A. V. Jennings, became large-scale project builders during the 1960s. However, these firms preferred using conventional techniques of production. Innovation since then has remained incremental, failing to shake the foundations of the structure which obstructed the early-post-war reformers' vision of mass production.

Commentators have been divided over explaining the failure to realise the modernist dream. Some—-such as Freeland (1972)—have stressed structural factors (size of the local market, structure of the industry, lack of industry concentration, Commonwealth/State friction, technical problems, etc) while others—such as Boyd (1991) and McDonell (1956)—have



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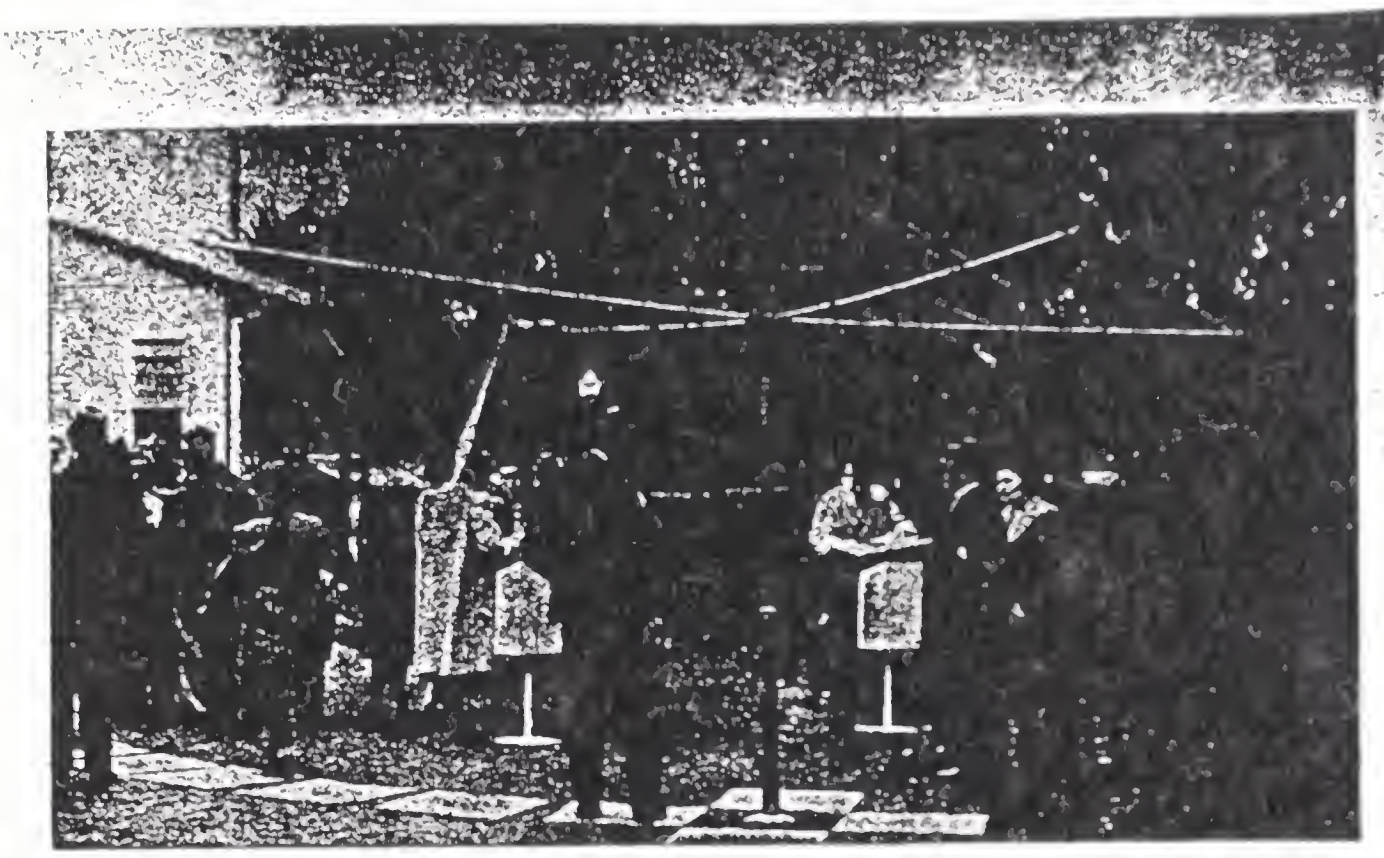
Enjoy Added Home Comfort Now!

Phone MU7064 for a quote . . .

INSULWOOL PRODUCTS
PTY. LTD.
20 QUEEN STREET, MELBOURNE

WRITE FOR ILLUSTRATED LEAFLET

Figure 4 Beaufort Home /Insulwool advertisement, 1946
(Australian Home Beautiful, August)



TOYNE'S ROTARY CLOTHES HOIST

at the BEAUFORT MODEL HOME, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne.

Toyne's only address: 2 Stanhope Street, Mont Albert, E.10, Victoria. Phone WX1441.

See Toyne's Stand near Women's Industries at Royal Show.

Australian Home Beautiful September, 1946. Page Forty-seven

Figure 5 Beaufort Home/Rotary Hoist advertisement, 1946
(Australian Home Beautiful, September)

stressed purposive factors (the influence of private interests, lack of state commitment, management and planning weaknesses, etc). In the face of conflicting evidence, Howard (1987, 122) suspended judgement, stating simply and truthfully that whether the flat market for prefabication 'was due solely to technical and economic problems in design or also to builder attitudes and organisational manoeuvring has not been ascertained'.

Regardless of these judgements, this experience holds important lessons in the contemporary environment where 'flexible specialisation', 'smart houses', 'computer-related manufacturing' and other concepts and practices associated with post-Fordism offer opportunities to modernise—or post-modernise—the housebuilding industry. These concepts and practices need to be understood within the specific framework of the structure of the housebuilding sector and both structural and purposive factors need to be identified as forces inhibiting and promoting change.

A recent report illustrates the continuing problem of approaches which are unidirectional and employ an abstract, universal view of technological and organisational change:

> *There is . . .a significant potential for the establishment of a 'post-industrial' housing production capability. Because housing in Australia, other than high rise residential, is predominantly organised around small scale builders working with independent subcontractors on a craft basis, with almost no unionisation, its structure is in tune with emerging trends in the manufacturing and service industries emphasising the value of flexibility achieved through the greater use of contract labour. In simple terms, as the housebuilding industry has not developed along the industrialised factory-based model of organisation, it is now well fitted to move directly to a post-industrialised, flexible and decentralised modell. The flexibility of IT allows a complete bypassing of the industrialised mass production route. . .(Johnston & Lepani 1993)*

The utility of this statement lies in its recognition that certain practices which are regarded as 'backward' and 'archaic' at one point in history can suddenly emerge as 'the solution' to 'the problems' of another era. However, within the teleological model of historical 'stage skipping' employed above, history has been predetermined by the conceptual

framework used. A linear and universal model of technological change has been used, providing a ready-made theory—or a ready-mixed theory!—into which concrete reality can be poured. As the principal investigator in Alain Lipietz's favourite novel—Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*—argues: 'The concepts which we fabricate are only ladders, threads by which to grasp something. After which, they can be thrown into the fire'. The thing we grasp—the subject of our research—should not be 'hung' on the ladder. Furthermore, it might be necessary to insert a more normative statement after the claim that the housing industry, being non-unionised, is 'in tune with' emerging industrial trends.

In contrast, Ball (1988, ch. 2) argues that any simple juxtaposition between different industry sectors based on a unitary, unilinear, scale of 'progress' is 'flawed both in practice and in principle'. The most that can be said from a relational perspective is that the building industry is 'different' from other industries. It is important to open up, rather than limit, the potential developmental trajectories of the industry. As Ball argues: 'Without the perfect universal technology applicable to the production of everything, how can you compare technologies on a scale of backward and forward? . .The backward view of the building industry is asking the wrong question.'

Housebuilding was not a 'forgotten' industry. The industry and its clients found innovative means of weathering the post-war storm without fully embracing the Fordist ideas of the industrial housing reformers. On this 'restricted' or 'production-oriented' level, the concept of Fordism has only limited practical as well as analytical value for the study of the housing industry in Australia.

THE FORDIST MODEL MARK 2

According to Lipietz (1985), the relationship between Fordism and housing extends beyond attempts to employ Fordist techniques in the process of housing production. Housing also performed a significant role in the stability and reproduction of the broader notion of the Fordist regime of accumulation, linking mass production with mass consumption. The housebuilding industry was 'deeply immersed in the Fordist pattern of development' (Lipietz 1985, section 1-14). Roobeek (1987, 133) also argues that the suburban market 'became crucial in the expansion of Fordism. Suburbanisation, which can be seen as a socio-organisational

innovation, made the integration of the auto-house-electrical appliance complex possible'. On this level, it can be argued that the post-war suburban dwelling stock became the 'functional containers' for new consumer durable products (Gunn 1991, 86).

It has only been within the past few years that a number of authors have begun exploring features of contemporary Australian urbanisation through the lens of the regulation approach (Berry 1990; Lowe 1994). Given their contemporary concerns, these studies have been more interested in exploring the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism—or explaining the crisis of Fordism. This section of the paper provides some historical background for these efforts, demonstrating that the specific form which housing assumed during the quarter of a century after World War II was important for the overall reproduction of the 'golden era' of the Fordist development. This task is undertaken using a range of existing historical and sociological literature. This range of literature is by no means necessarily regulationist in character. However, as Boyer (1990, xix) points out, most contributions within regulation theory 'have been grounded on historical syntheses or monographs which made use of very different approaches'.

The seeds of Australian Fordism (mass production plus mass consumption) were planted during the 1920s and reached maturity during the long boom after the Second World War (see Connell & Irving 1980). The dynamism of the Australian long boom lay in export demand, foreign investment expenditure, a more interventionist state, and rising levels of domestic consumption (Whitwell 1989). This latter variable was crucial for the expansion of the Fordist regime. Consumer durables, along with the residential container for mass consumption, were the outward manifestations of a stable Fordist regime of accumulation—or the specific form assumed by post-war capitalism. The coincidence of an interventionist state, mass production, mass consumption and a belief in the powers of infinite technical and social progress permeated all areas of post-war social change, including urban development. According to McLoughlin (1993, 25), Melbourne's experience of metropolitan growth was based on a 'seemingly unshakeable faith in Fordist growth, in the politics of Keynesian welfarism . . .in democratic capitalism, and in the overall project of modernity'.

The following account draws on a number of commentators who have observed a correlation between home-ownership, suburbanisation and the advent of the consumer society in post-war Australia, and it is argued that these analyses and historical accounts are compatible with a regulationist perspective.

Whitwell (1989, 38) has labelled the post-war pattern of consumer behaviour 'the suburban imperative' involving a 'trilogy of compulsive needs'. This trilogy, which lay at 'the heart of the post-war consumer society' and was reinforcing, included the suburban house, a range of 'labour-saving' household appliances and the private automobile.

Suburbanisation long predated post-war developments in Australia. However, in a number of influential articles in the early 1980s, Patrick Mullins (1981a, 1981b) distinguished pre-war Australian suburbanisation from post-war suburbanisation, noting that the former corresponded to Australia's mercantilist capitalist development while the latter corresponded to the emergence of monopoly capitalism. The pre-war 'urban peasant community' was structured to facilitate the household production of goods and services, while the post-war suburban community emphasised the generalised consumption of serially-produced consumer durables. The vegie garden, the fruit trees, the chook run and the rabbito all reflected the productive household activities of the pre-war urban peasantry. As Kerreen Reiger (1985) has pointed out, modernist concerns—in fields such as health and hygiene—contributed to the erosion of the fabric of this form of community from the turn of the century onwards, and, as Mullins' (1981b, 40) notes, 'the growth of monopoly capitalism and the suburban community removed such productive necessities - and therefore the necessity of - the urban peasant community'.

Mullins' ideal typology of forms of urban settlement patterns mirrors that of the regulation theorists, and sets the specific urban context for the Australian Fordist regime of accumulation. The post-war suburban community promoted the consumption of serially-produced consumer durables and encouraged the commodification of productive activities previously conducted within the domestic economy.

The growth of a more sophisticated, modern, advertising industry during the 1950s was also a reflection of changing patterns of production and

consumption. According to Blackburn (1992), manufacturers needed 'a way to keep up the momentum of mass production that had been used to meet the pent-up consumer demand from the war'. By the mid-1950s the advertising world had clearly recognised that the maintenance of a strong market was dependent on the growth of suburban home-ownership and of newly formed young households. Therefore, they targeted 'the new suburbs where many young families were building their homes and seeking to equip them with consumer durables and products' (Blackburn 1992). Advertisements for new homes, building materials, interior decoration and whitegoods frequently portrayed newly married couples—many of the women were still in their wedding outfits (see Figures 6, 7 & 8). Diane Powell's (1993, 80-1) book on the development of Mount Pritchard in Western Sydney describes how waves of commercial travellers and door-to-door salesmen beat against new suburban doors, signing up clients on hire-purchase contracts.

Blackburn's work is also consistent with the regulation perspective. Mass advertising is seen as a conduit linking mass production with mass consumption and reinforcing the strength of the Fordist regime of accumulation. To paraphrase Weber (1978), the consumer ethic fostered the spirit of Fordism. The irony in recalling Weber is that 'the habits of frugality and thrift' (Blackburn) or 'asceticism' (Weber) were unlearned through the efforts—or 'the call'—of the advertising world. This 'irony' was identified by Daniel Bell (1976, 21) as one of the key cultural contradictions of contemporary capitalism:

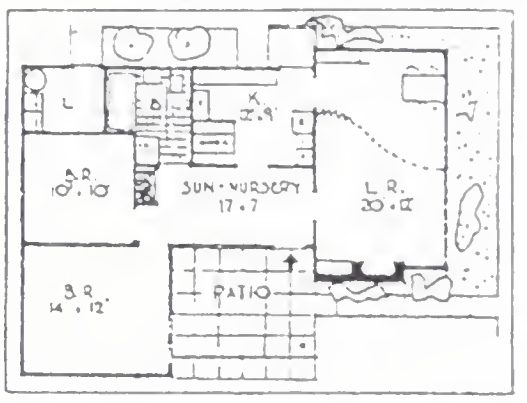
> *In the early development of capitalism, the unrestrained economic impulse was held in check by Puritan restraint and the Protestant ethic. One worked because of one's obligation to one's calling, or to fulfil the covenant of the community. But the Protestant ethic was undermined not by modernism but by capitalism itself. The greatest single engine in the destruction of the Protestant ethic was the invention of the instalment plan, or instant credit. Previously one had to save in order to buy. But with credit cards one could indulge in instant gratification. The system was transformed by mass production and mass consumption, by the creation of new wants and new means of gratifying those wants.*

..AND A NEW *MONOCRETE* HOME OF THEIR OWN TO GO TO!

Wouldn't you like a cheerful lifetime home of your own —a home that's bright, modern, and spacious—fun to live in? There's a striking series of colourful Monocrete designs, all having a room more than a brick house of similar size. There's plenty of room for additions, too, as your family grows.

What is Monocrete?

Monocrete is insulated concrete masonry — the tough reinforced 4" slabs are twice as strong as 11" cavity brick walls, giving lots more living room. Your Monocrete home is permanent —rust, fire and vermin proof—can be erected in less than three weeks. It's warm and cosy in winter, cool in summer — there's only 2° temperature variation inside for every 20° outside.



Plan of the house illustrated above.

What Is It Going To Cost Me?

Well, naturally, costs vary according to size and design. But we can say this—"Monocrete" is by far the most economical *permanent* home-building material on the market to-day because of the extra living space it provides.

Write for the FREE illustrated booklet —go and inspect for yourself the Monocrete Exhibition Home at Villawood. Write and ask us all the questions you wish—we'll gladly help to solve your personal housing problems with a home you'll be proud to own . . . at a price you can afford.

MONIER ROOFING TILES

Red, grey, brown, yellow, green and orange — single tone or mottled . . . available immediately for Monocrete homes.

MONOCRETE

MONOCRETE PTY. LTD., MONIER SQUARE, VILLAWOOD, N.S.W.

P.O. Box 18, Lidcombe, N.S.W. 'Phone: UB 1351 (5 lines)

Also at Kingston, Canberra.

A DIVISION OF CONCRETE INDUSTRIES (ABST.) LIMITED

Figure 6 Advertisement for Monocrete, 1949
(Australian House and Garden, June)

Figure 7 Advertisement for Laminex, 1952
(Australian House and Garden, November)

Figure 8 Advertisement for Bendix automatic washing machine, 1955
(Australian House and Garden, March)

Whitwell (1989, 5) also points to the rejection of the 'traditional, puritan-inspired attitude that marriage should be postponed until couples had sufficient savings to buy the essential household goods' as an example of the changed psychological state and sense of greater security which inspired post-war mass consumerism.

Other observers of Australian 'affluence' have pointed out that the suburban container and its contents epitomised the local 'way of life'. For instance, Blackburn (1992) described how the advertising profession during the 1950s linked consumer durables with identity formation. White (1981) also regarded the notion of *an* Australian 'way of life' as a particular product of post-war social change and social tensions, and associates it with a defence of the status quo, stability, intolerance, anti-communism, Cold War defensiveness and homogeneity. It also justified an attitude of suspicion towards immigration and towards cultural diversity. This mood was custom-made for serialised mass production and mass consumption.

These images capture the post-war fusion of mass production, mass consumption and suburban home ownership. Harvey's general point—that Fordism was more than a mere description for an economic system and more a total way of life—was as relevant for Australia as any other post-war economy.

CONCLUSION

This paper has tested the relevance and utility of Fordism as an analytical tool for explaining developments within the sphere of housing provision. The historical period explored corresponded with the halcyon days of Fordism, or the era when regulation theorists have claimed the Fordist regime of accumulation achieved its highest degree of stability. The paper examined two different uses of the Fordist concept. In the first—more restricted, productionist—sense of Fordism, the evidence suggests that extreme care is required in applying the concept to the housebuilding sector, and that it is essential to avoid unilinear, teleological and universal readings of technological change.

But, from a wider perspective, the Fordist lens appears to offer more possibilities as a vantage point for approaching housing provision in post-war Australia. It points to a wide range of social and institutional relations

which need to be taken into consideration when approaching any specific facet of housing.

While the conceptual tools employed by the regulation school place housing provision and housing consumption within a general model of socio-historical development, they also stress the specificity of local political, economic and institutional environments. In the case of post-war Australia, they help demonstrate that the specific form which housing provision and urban settlement patterns assumed was related to the long post-war boom. These patterns were also integral to the stability of the post-war Fordist model of development. Historical material from a range of perspectives can be brought forward to support this position.

Combined with Mullins' work on historical urban settlement patterns, the regulationist perspective offers useful guides not only to appreciating the contours of the recent past, but also to pointing out, or more correctly opening up, possible futures. While Fordism in this societal sense corresponded to suburbanisation, commodification, privatisation and home ownership, there is no justification on *a priori* grounds to suggest that in the future some general logic of capital accumulation will demand ever-expanding suburbanisation and home-ownership. In this vein, Castells' (1977, 388) description of the single-family home in the suburbs as the 'perfect design for maximising capitalist consumption' needs to be historically qualified. A regulation perspective, combined with Mullins' analysis of Australian urbanisation, underlines the importance of contingency and historical specificity. In the Australian case, specific epochs of development corresponded with distinct patterns of settlement. If post-war suburbanisation and rising levels of home-ownership are related to the Fordist 'fit' between mass production and mass consumption, then post-war suburbanisation should be viewed as a specific pattern of development distinct from earlier extensive settlement patterns. In other words, if the history of capitalism has been a series of models of development—as the regulationists argue and as Mullins work suggests—then it is futile formulating any general relationship between capitalism, housing and urbanisation.

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